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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000222

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH: REQUEST FOR AGRICULTURE BIOTECHNOLOGY  
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FUNDS

REF: A. STATE 228322

[1](#)B. STATE 244670

[1](#)1. The U.S. Mission in Dhaka is pleased to submit three project proposals totaling \$13,000 for agriculture biotechnology outreach funds through EB. The Bangladesh government (BDG) has taken the decision to use biotechnology in agriculture but has not yet succeeded in convincing all members of the agriculture community of the necessity or safety of this plan. The proposed projects will allow the Mission to assist the BDG in our shared goal of advancing the study and use of biotechnology in Bangladeshi agriculture as a means to enhance the BDG's ability to feed its population, slow the rate of increased dependence on fertilizer and insecticide, and improve the capacity of the Bangladeshi scientific community to make science-based decisions on the safety of individual biotechnology food products. The possibility of funds being made available and ideas for appropriate projects have already been discussed with Bangladeshi partner agencies and interest is high.

[1](#)2. The lack of crop rotation, the overuse of fertilizer and insecticides, and possibly also the presence of arsenic in the soil and water have begun to degrade the agricultural output of Bangladeshi farmers. Local opponents of biotechnology in agriculture claim that the strains of plants currently available are themselves a biohazard. In Bangladesh, the need for an open forum to conduct the next phase of this debate, as well as a training program for Bangladeshi scientists to develop their capacity to test GMOs for safety, is made more urgent by the fact that the BDG has already made the decision to press forward with bio-engineered agriculture to boost agricultural productivity.

[1](#)3. The Mission's approach has been to seek ways to prompt the BDG to adopt policies that protect consumers and the environment, promote timely, transparent, science-based decisions, and facilitate trade in bio-engineered products. To accomplish these objectives, we have developed strategies to better inform members of the NGO, academic, and media sectors about the factors surrounding biotechnology options for agriculture. The projects proposed below will allow the Mission to advance its efforts in Bangladesh to implement our strategies and further engage our targeted audiences:

A) International Visitor Program on Testing for Bio-Engineered Food Safety:

--Timing: Summer 2005

--Estimated Cost: \$7,000

--Post Responsible Officer: Econ Officer Barbara Keary  
; 880-2-885-5500, x2180

Through the Cochran Fellowship under the USDA, Bangladeshi scientists can be trained in the U.S. in tissue culturing and other techniques for use in testing imported, bio-engineered foods for consumer safety. This knowledge gap was specifically identified by the BARC as a critical need in the Bangladeshi scientific community as a way to perform due diligence in protecting consumers and to provide concrete evidence to the public of the safety of bio-engineered food products imported from overseas. Several Bangladeshi scientists have already applied for the Cochran Fellowship, which covers all expenses and training for fellows while in the U.S. but does not pay for travel to and from the U.S. EB's biotechnology outreach funds would provide a perfect dovetail to the USDA program by covering the travel expenses for those Bangladeshi scientists selected by USDA for the Cochran Fellowship.

B) Multilateral Bangladesh Biotechnology Conference:

--Timing: Summer 2005

--Estimated Cost: \$12,000

--Post Responsible Officer: Econ Officer Barbara Keary  
; 880-2-885-5500, x2180

In conjunction with the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Center (BARC), the Bangladeshi Academy of Science, the FAS, the Econ section and other mission elements, the Mission's Public Affairs program office would identify Indian, American, Bangladeshi and possibly other South Asian regional participants for a multilateral conference on biotechnology in Bangladesh and South Asia. The conference is currently envisioned as being two days long, with the first day being

devoted to a well-rounded debate of bio-technology issues and a review of BDG agro-biotech policy, with particular reference to its safety and commercialization. The second day would be set aside for the preparation of an action plan to be presented to the BDG on next steps. The program for this seminar was designed in partnership with the BARC to ensure maximum utility for the next stage of the biotechnology debate in Bangladesh and therefore the greatest impact of funds. Two thirds of the funds requested are to cover travel expenses from the U.S. for recognized experts in the field to headline the conference. We would seek the participation of all targeted groups, including media, to ensure that exchanges are covered in the press. This forum would contribute to our efforts both to shape the national debate and dispel myths and ill-informed concerns about bio-engineered foods and other products.

THOMAS